

Empowering, advocating for and inspiring social justice

Emily Elbert feels very passionate about new *We Who Believe in Freedom* CD's message.

By Jan Sikes

IF YOU COULD SEAMLESSLY COMBINE THE essences of Bonnie Raitt and Joan Baez, you'd come up with Emily Elbert. She has the gritty soulfulness of Raitt along with the folk roots of Baez. She is the true expression of a revolutionary female music artist.

We Who Believe in Freedom is Elbert's fifth album, and by her own admission, a much different direction for her.

But, let's go back to the beginning. Elbert grew up in Coppell and says her deepest and earliest influence in music is her father. She recalls hearing him play piano around the house from the time she was born.

"My dad's ear for harmony and his musicality, in general, was outstanding and a part of everyday living for us. He plays with a lot of wisdom, and I feel blessed to have grown up hearing that in the house as well as the wide variety of music he and my mom loved. I was exposed to classical and jazz alongside other artists such as James Taylor. I got a lot of good music in my ears," Elbert said.

Elbert noted that it was a natural progression for her to learn piano, but it wasn't until she picked up the guitar as a teenager that she found her music wings.

"When I picked up the guitar I was pretty immediately crazy about it. And, it kinda' felt like it gave me permission to sing," Elbert recalled. "I was actually shy. But, once I had the guitar, it gave me the confidence to sing. I started playing around town pretty soon after that. The first

recollection I have of playing in a public place, besides church, was at a retirement for my middle school librarian."

Poor David's Pub and the Kessler are two venues she remembers playing in during those early years.

"The first music artist that ever took a chance on me and let me open for them was Sarah Hickman. She invited me down to Houston to open for her at the Mucky Duck. That was probably twelve or thirteen years ago. There is so much good music happening here in Texas."

I certainly couldn't argue with that statement.

It is obvious from listening to *We Who Believe in Freedom*, that Emily Elbert feels very passionate about its message. While the desire to see society regain and reclaim itself in some sort of balance is not unusual these days, her methodology is.

From the first song on the CD to the last, she empowers, encourages, and challenges each of us to be an active part of that change. In a merging of groove-laden soul and introspective folk styles, Elbert shares her reflections on today's political climate, and also brings a new light to the work of revolutionary artists like Marvin Gaye and Pete Seeger.

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new direction for me. In the past, my songs have ranged from the personal to more observational with a variety of influences. But this time, it's specifically focused on peace and social justice.

That's the intention and purpose of the project. It was a powerful experience to approach it with such a focused sense of purpose."

The album consists of half original songs and half from the last one hundred years that are relevant to things going on in the world today.

The oldest song on the album is "You Go to Your Church, and I'll Go to Mine." An old bluegrass

song originally recorded in the thirties, it carries such a clear message. "You go to your church, and I'll go to mine. But, let's walk along together." It advocates for putting differences of opinion aside and living life in harmony.

"It's easy now, it's tempting, to make sort of broad stroke generalizations about people when in reality, I think at our core, we all want to care for each other and want what's best for each other," said Elbert.

"So, it's powerful for me to hear that message of inclusivity coming from an old-time country song. That sense of religious tolerance and compassion is not

always closely affiliated with that style of music."

The message in "Ella's Song," is as strong as a Cajun coffee. It was written by Berniece Johnson Reagon, who was a composer, scholar, and social activist. "We who believe in freedom cannot rest" is the lyrical pillar of the song, as well as the line that inspired the title of Elbert's new CD. The lyrics go on to proclaim, "...And until the killing of a black man/Black mother's son/Is as important as the killing of a white man/White mother's son/There cannot be peace." If you only listen to one track on this album, make this the one.

Original songs

The three original songs on the album, "The Healing," "True Power" and "Service," continue with the concept.

There is a call to action in "The Healing." All voices are needed to speak up and to listen.

"True Power can't be bought or stolen/If you build a wall of hatred/Prepare to watch it crumble," are lyrics delivered with such vocal power and conviction. This song is directly referring to President Trump.

Elbert said, "I didn't go into the album making process having written "Service" already. When I got to what I thought was going to be the end of, the culmination of the recording process, I got a very clear message that it wasn't quite done and that there was one more piece waiting to be added. So, it was this cool process of summing up the intention and purpose of the project with one more song. And I kept getting this voice pop up inside my head asking, who am I, a white girl from Coppell, Texas, to be making an album about social justice? But it was something I felt and still feel, strongly about."

The lyrics to "Service" bring it all full circle and is thought-provoking. "How can I best be of service/To help this hurting world heal/To feel the depth of my privilege/Acting from love, not from fear/To stand firm on the shoulders/Of wise ones who've sacrificed/Cause Lord knows that there's a long road ahead/If we're gonna carry on their work and make things right..."

Emily summed it all up with these words.

"I think my job as a musician is to, as authentically as possible, sing what is truly in my heart and my mind and in sync with my values. I can't just sing songs to entertain."

And while Elbert may not be singing simply to entertain, I can assure you that her vocal prowess and guitar playing is top-notch entertainment.

Her favorite guitar to play on stage is a Gibson 335, but she is quick to add that she also plays a treasured Martin acoustic that she's had since high school.

When asked if she had words of wisdom for any young female artist starting in the business, she replied, "Really tune into your values and what you feel in your heart...what brings you joy and what you truly believe in, and follow that path. Stay true to your authentic self."

If you'd like to learn more about Emily Elbert, you can head over to her website emilyelbert.com